

Preface

In April 1970 the First Earth Day took place, an event designed to focus national attention on environmental problems and find a positive alternative to the social disruptions caused by the Vietnam War, particularly among college students. Many millions turned out for the event, stunning its sponsor, Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, and the legislative staff who helped him plan it. As a member of Nelson's legislative team, Dennis Brezina recalls their efforts and their reactions in his oral history.

Born on February 27, 1937, in Oak Park, Illinois, Dennis Walter Brezina graduated as valedictorian from the Fox Lake (Illinois) high school in 1955. He attended the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, where in 1959 he received an award for the Midshipman who is adjudged best in those courses most basic to naval engineering. In 1964 he received an M.A. in the history of science from Harvard University, and later did work on a Ph.D. at George Washington University.

When he came to Washington, he worked at the Naval Scientific and Technical Intelligence Center and the Public Information Office of the National Bureau of Standards before joining the Science Research Division of the Legislative Reference Service (the forerunner of the Congressional Research Service). In 1967 he joined the staff of the Senate Government Operations Committee's Subcommittee on Government Research, chaired by Fred Harris, an Oklahoma Democrat. Regarded by some senators as an "egghead" committee, Harris' subcommittee conducted oversight investigations into a wide range of health, science, and social science issues, including the implications of biomedical research, the geographical distribution of research and development funds and the social causes of civil disturbances. As a result of jurisdictional disputes with other senators, the Harris subcommittee was disbanded in early 1969.

Brezina then joined Senator Nelson's staff, where in addition to Earth Day he also worked on foreign policy issues, on the health and environmental risks of the military's use of Agent Orange as a defoliant in Vietnam, and on the Environmental Education Act. With Allen Overmyer he wrote *Congress in Action: The Environmental Education Act* (New York, Free Press, 1974).

He later worked on Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign in 1976, and then withdrew from the political scene to operate a bed and breakfast in Maryland. Beginning in 1995 he directed "After the Car Door Closes," Alumanon, Inc., in which he developed a system called "Roadside Archeology." He conducted coast to coast surveys in all 48 continental states—taking shoe leather epidemiology into the Lewis and Clark league—to determine the discard rate of alcohol beverage containers along the nation's roadsides. He put a face on teenage in-vehicle drinking and illegal drug use by compiling those surveys with often in-depth interviews of thousands of grassroots alcohol and drug professionals and law enforcement officials—an open-ended national focus group. These survey/interview packages were well-received by state legislatures and by the Congress. Sixteen state legislator introduced measures based on the data and fourteen bills have passed the legislatures. A report requested by the U.S. House of

Representatives Committee on Government Reform was also well received. Coverage in the print media has occurred in two-thirds of the states, on public and commercial radio, and on NBC-TV "Nightly News." He described this long-term project in a poem, "Wing Tip to Wing Tip."

Butterfly maps --
Data colorfully compressed --
Competing with an electronic world,
Spiral from littered roadsides
To gleaming corridors of power,
Alight on Governors' and Senators' desks,
Lolling on piles
Of incoming mail.

An adventure of 42,000 miles
Across 48 states
Begins with a lot of confusion
And fuss well before
The first step.

Never a journey
Planned to challenge
Political correctness.
Yet, postmodern male heroics --
Expose the car as place,
The roadside as landfill. . . .

From Maine to Washington State --
Wing tip to wing tip --
The message is clear.
Motor vehicles, well-oiled,
Play host year round to
Lubricating drivers and riders. . . .

975 --
The average rate
of beer cans and bottles,
randomly discarded,
Per mile of road per year.
Split 50/50 --
Teens to adults. . . .

Data orchestrated,
Successfully parlayed into
Program and policy
From grassroots to law makers,
Federal and state. . . .

Where golden eagles soar,

Magpies play,
And Scissor-tailed Flycatchers perch.
Where elusive Three-toed Woodpeckers
Scale cedar trees
And White Admirals
From flower to flower flit.

Discarded cans
And bottles of beer --
Wing tip to wing tip.
Irrefutable proof
Of a distorted American Dream.